

The IHC South Asian Religions and Cultures Research Focus Group Presents

*Self-Formation and Selflessness  
in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Tradition*

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The sixteenth-century Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition proposes a unique model of grace that decenters the paradigm of atonement and forgiveness and instead centers on forgetting and remembrance. In this Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* tradition, *jīvas*, embodied beings, occupy a unique intermediary position that identifies them both in relationship to Kṛṣṇa, the supreme Godhead, and to the material world of *prakṛti*. *Jīvas* can therefore choose to either turn towards or away from Kṛṣṇa. A person turns away from or forgets Kṛṣṇa by committing *aparādhas*, “offenses,” such as criticizing one’s *guru*. However, *aparādhas* should not be conceptualized as “sins” that require atonement and forgiveness. Instead, *aparādhas* reflect an orientation of forgetfulness, which can best be remedied through remembrance. Remembering Kṛṣṇa occurs primarily through *sādhana-bhakti* practices such as chanting and meditation and culminates in a devotee’s recognition of their eternal identity in relationship to Kṛṣṇa. Such perfected devotional selves embody the principle of *sevā*, selfless service, in which the devotee’s realm of concern has shifted entirely away from the ego-bound self towards Kṛṣṇa. It is therefore through the process of becoming perfectly selfless that perfected devotional selves are formed.

Eileen Goddard is a doctoral student in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her research interests include South Asian religious traditions, comparative philosophy, *bhakti* traditions, and gender and sexuality.



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